

**THE DISENCHANTED: A MODERN CONSIDERATION OF THE
TRANSFORMATIVE FORCE OF TECHNICITY**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

CHRISTOPHER DAVID BLACK

Submitted to Honors and Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by
Research Advisor

Dr. Claire Katz

May 2014

Major: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The Disenchanted: A Modern Consideration of the Transformative Force of Technicity. (May 2014)

Christopher David Black
Department of Philosophy
Texas A&M University
Research Advisor: Dr. Claire Katz
Department of Philosophy/Department of Women's and Gender Studies

In this project I will create a philosophically rigorous assessment of what it means *to be* in the 21st century. I will conceptualize the human subject in relation to the primary signifier of the contemporary age: rapid technological advancement. The ideology that lies beneath technology and science will be shown to be resistant to the conceptualization of the self as a subject and instead promotes a conception of the self to be experienced as an object of study. My examination will draw upon a vast resource of relevant scholarship in an attempt to elucidate the conditions that allow for the emergence of a new self. As Being discloses the world via complex coordinated systems and its involvement with various tools and technological methodologies, and as systems and technologies are continually transforming and unfolding in time, Being necessarily comes to know itself and the world in new and unforeseeable ways. There is a lack of serious philosophical inquiry into how and why Being is so rapidly transforming in apparent sync with the evolution of technology and instrumental processes, and my project will fit into and help to fill this void. As technoscientific progress increases exponentially with time, fundamental phenomenological and ontological questions are presented in entirely new ways, and I will provide an original and reflective perspective on this issue and synthesize views in order to reveal the internal mechanics of modern ideals of progress.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my fellow Glasscock Undergraduate Scholars – Thomas Sekula, Jessi Green, Michael Gonzales, and Desirae Embree - who have made the process of writing this paper most enjoyable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would specifically like to thank Dr. Claire Katz for her support and guidance, as well as the Department of Philosophy at Texas A&M University for the continued intellectual cultivation and encouragement that they have never failed to offer. I would also like to thank the Glasscock Center for Humanities Research as well as the Undergraduate Research Scholars program for their support in the completion of this project.

CHAPTER I

MYOPIA

"The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. *The actual threat has already affected man in his essence.* The rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth" –Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

One of Western philosophy's oldest desires - stretching back to Thales and the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle - is a desire for knowledge of what is "real" and how it can be understood in the most clearly informed manner. Seen as such, modern scientifically informed technology is not indicative of a new age of thought, but rather it is suggestive of movement towards the fulfillment of the oldest desires of Western philosophy. The 19th century French philosopher Auguste Comte, credited with the development of sociology as a discipline, and the 20th century German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, among others, agree on this point.

However, even though Western thought may have made significant strides in the direction of achieving a more "accurate" account of what is "real" in the world, the forces at work within the agent of this progress have undergone a radical metamorphosis. The new understanding of Being, borne of a self-contained technological epistemology, has bizarrely functioned to constrain rather than liberate the human's understanding of self and others. Thus the project of Enlightenment has undergone a dialectical reversal as displayed by Horkheimer and Adorno in

The Concept of Enlightenment. Apprehended scientifically human Being becomes quantifiable, narrow, instrumental, and one-dimensional. The original relationship between science and the promotion of human welfare by way of liberation from mortal and material scarcity has become obfuscated, and human well-being is often merely a means to furthering scientific ends. While many critiques of unbridled technoscience (notably out of the Frankfurt School) have attacked the political power apparatuses at work that invert the ideal humanistic relationship between society and science and perpetuate a technocratic state, a critique within the confines of scientific methodology in isolation and apart from political power structures can reveal ideologies internal to the scientific methodology itself that have inevitably led to such an inverted relationship.

In his 1927 book, *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger attempts to reassess the question of Being and to save it from the hegemonizing forces of thought that had come to define it. As such, he offered a more pluralistic account of modes of being in order to free conceptions of the self-in-the-world that had been precluded by the dominant thought systems of his time. In his illuminating 1949 essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger relies on contemporary accounts of technoscientific theory and practice to make his arguments about the dangers of enframing (which is the tendency to calculate and instrumentalize all that there is) and the obsession with perceiving everything in terms of instrumentality and mechanistic utility. So perceived, other people reflexively come to be viewed as means to an end according to an implicit and definitive teleology – a way of thinking that Immanuel Kant warned of as early as in his 1785 essay “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals.” The other becomes a machine that is either functional or not, rather than a robust and indivisible spiritual self. The totalizing end game orientation of technoscience purports to most accurately grasp the gamut of Being, yet

insofar as it is constrained by its own internal logic it falls prey to a myopia that pre-cognitively dismisses a spectroscopic understanding of Being as rich, textured, and fundamentally plural.

New examples of technological catalysts developed within this this manner of thinking come into existence daily. The manner in which emergent technologies such as phones, cameras, and computers are used and internalized is suggestive of a fundamentally reshaped ontological understanding of the self and a divorced epistemology of self-understanding and world understanding. Viewing people as means to an end is nothing new. However, technology allows this mode of relating to people to be more easily accessed, impersonal, anonymous, and free of risk than prior to this kind of technology. Most significantly this way of relating to others is internalized behind the lens through which the totality of Being is filtered and understood. It is the internalization of the techno-teleological epistemology that sets this modern social age as radically particular relative to previous ages insofar as the implicit rhetoric of this age speaks towards a demystification and *complex simplification* of Being rather than an enhanced understanding of the manifold forms of being, and thus the existential and the mystic is subjected to a repressive tolerance that casually but confidently dismisses such individualistic and non-reproducible aspects of being from the world of “real” possibility.

I will attempt a broad critique of the modern technological mentality with existential and humanistic concerns in mind, while including and appropriating several thinkers and approaches into my critique in order to develop an existentially rich understanding of the current crisis of existential sedation as it relates and is connected with the technological phenomenon.

CHAPTER II

DISENCHANTMENT

“The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.” - Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation*

The dominant scientific methodological way of thinking has established itself as a hegemonizing force of thought in questions concerning what it means to “be” in the world. Recognizing this, Heidegger offered a more pluralistic account of modes of being in order to free conceptions of the self-in-the-world that had been stifled and precluded by the dominant thought systems of his time. Foucault’s account of contemporary biopower, amongst several other accounts in the same vein of thought, follows Heidegger’s thought in describing how technicity ontologically reduces all entities to fundamentally meaningless (lacking intrinsic or self-contained value) resources to be optimized, organized, and deployed in the name of instrumentality. Yet Heidegger does not simply describe the way in which Being is monopolized and dictated by scientific prioritization, he also makes a curious negative claim about such thinking insofar as he suggests that something powerful and fundamental is forbidden by such technoscientific thought. He warns that the “The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more *original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.*” This chapter will take this fairly ambiguous and ominous warning of Heidegger as its

point of departure and clarify and exemplify what this threat is to the *experience* of a primal truth of being, and peel back the layers and structures that obstruct such an experience from being attained. Revealing how modern foundational concepts of a “real experience” are defined by the reductive demands of technical thinking will be the manner in which this abstract idea is approached and analyzed.

This is an age that accommodates and implicitly encourages a highly efficient reduction and distribution of just about everything, including one another. Rationality, the most significant product and legacy of the Enlightenment, is the understood basis of the functionality of the progressive Western society (Weber, 7). Indeed, many social behaviors and manners of speaking saturated by rationalistic discourse suggest that those responsible for the creation of this language of discourse have fallen within their own creation insofar as they are now being included within the language as a “standing reserve” of potential resources, pure *Bestand*, means to an end. Such attributes of the age are readily exemplified in many major aspects of culture, from the spread of scientific management (think merely of the name “human resources division” and what that unabashedly declares) and Taylorism, which is a theory of management that emphasizes economic efficiency, to internet pornography, which is oriented around the idea of an efficient libidinal outlet. Human concern for each other is easily lost when one is thinking in terms of data points and pixels, as the multi-sensory embodied human experience is marginalized, de-emphasized, and rendered incommunicable within a conversation concerned with repeatable universals.

Undoubtedly this exponential increase in scientific thinking has made the task of killing and controlling one another infinitely easier and more efficient. This has been the force of many arguments against civilizations unmodulated rush towards a techno-utopia. Like opening Pandora's Box in splitting the atom, many argue that modern mass technology has introduced tools into our world that have and will continue to bring about only destruction and affliction, rather than guaranteeing a safe and prosperous future.

Further, these technologies create a system of self-perpetuation which requires all later developments to operate within that pre-existing framework. The technological phenomenon has achieved a disconcerting level of autonomy, with any collective action against it almost certain to fail before it can begin due to an inability to operate by any other system. Certain foundational ideas have fused together to form a system which have swollen to a size beyond the possible voice of contradiction insofar as the system disallows contradiction to be acknowledged and respected as an legitimate voice. This is because the ideology of technicity has laid claim to the whole of the domain of truth (and by extension reality, as there is an understood direct relationship between the two) and laid the ground-rules by which it can be known, and therefore that which does not accord with these ground-rules is dismissed into the dimension of unreason and unreality.

Macroscopic concerns about the nature of the technoscientific age such as the irreversible threat of a nuclear apocalypse are significant and are worthy of the strong consideration that they have received. However, these concerns speak in the language of externalization and fail to consider the manner in which the individual is internally restructured and reconditioned by technicity and

its implicit ideological underpinning. Technology, along with its products, is defined by a fundamental mode of thinking and a manner of assessing and evaluating experience. This technological mode of thinking allows for the possibility of technology as it appears phenomenologically to come into being in the first place. As the social consciousness bucked against myth and unreason it defined itself and its epistemology in terms of a rigorous empiricism and thus left no room in which the particular moment of experience to be held as significant or valid.

Aldous Huxley, in his treatise on *Literature and Science*, recognizes that the scientist inhabits a distinct universe of thought which is not concerned with the unique and particular aspects of life as it is lived by the individual. Rather, the scientist operates in an arena of quantified regularities and inferred structures. The scientist only values results which are shareable and capable of being universally applied, as that is what scientific methodology demands. Primitivists such as John Zerzan insist that science claims that only that which is reproducible and predictable is actually real and important, and that any anomalous event is simply cast-off as a broken piece of machinery (Zerzan, 40). Set up in opposition to the world of the scientist is the world of lived experience. In *Eye and Mind*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a 20th century French phenomenologist, recognizes that science seeks to take flight from the character of this more primitive and fleshy mode of being. This world that science takes flight from is that world of individual existential relevance. It is that world in which social pressures and individual impulses, instincts and conventions, passion conflicting with reason, and unshareable feelings and emotions are contained. An individual impulse, an intuition, or an unshareable emotion have no place in

scientific methodology as they cannot be dissected and distributed, or communicated symbolically in a piece of data.

As previously mentioned, the scientific methodology that dominates our age is no more than the culmination of the Western intellectual tradition. Operationalism and behaviorism dominate the sciences, the key feature being a complete and relentless empiricism in the treatment of concepts. In so doing this mode of thinking has functionally replaced many of the former pillars of civilization. Religious faith, among others, has been largely removed and replaced by the more rigorous and empirical epistemology of science. Religious ritual still takes place, but as Lyotard and others postmodernists point out, it has lost the deep and unquestioning conviction of past centuries – it is now largely a ceremonial aspect of a practical behaviorism. It is a harmless and benign ritual, or no more than just an exercise in cultural nostalgia. Basically it is delegitimated (Lyotard 37). It is singing hymns on Christmas and the family prayer before Thanksgiving dinner while otherwise living in a state of decadence. Modern religious rituals are vestiges of departed convictions – society is haunted by the ghosts of dead beliefs.

The claim that scientism has in certain ways functionally replaced religion is worthy of consideration. Personal merit or credibility as was formerly judged by one's perceived relationship with the Divine is now in many cases judged in relation to one's alignment with the new Truth. In times past the church and its hierarchy functioned as the final overseer of truth. In cases such as in the banning of Copernicus' heliocentric book- *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* the church would simply ban an idea that did not fall in line with church doctrine. Now in light of the dialectical reversal society has submitted to a rule by "experts" in a systemic

technocracy rather than rule by those with spiritual supremacy. Doctors tell you what is best to do with your body, psychiatrists are given authority over your mind, financial planners dictate how to use and grow your money, issues of national concern are handled by politicians, and so on. Thinkers such as Thorstein Veblen and Howard Scott, in the tone and current of Frederick Taylor, argued that government should be managed by technicians who operate in line with the imperatives of their technology. Having done away with intolerable government which claimed authority stemming from a relation to a metaphysical God, the openness to government which claims authority stemming from a desacralized relationship to the knowledge of the applied principles of the material universe represents the antithesis of the prior sacralized theistically oriented form of government. It indicates a binary interchange between the spiritual and the material as a primary source of authority.

Thus science gathered rationally and manifested in technology operates as the ὁ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ (Aristotle's unmoved mover) of advanced industrial society – no force comes prior to it, it is an abstract reservoir of principles that contains within itself the potentiality and enaction of the movement and functionality of all Being. What results from a total commitment to technological rationality is what Marcuse calls a “pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior.” Insofar as someone has been conditioned to think of himself as inextricably enmeshed within a determinate chain of causality, he feels himself incapable of making a radical move outside of the story as he is already biologically predetermined to be this entity, and thus a fatalistic Durkheimian anomie is given space to thrive within and around the torsion resultant of an internalized helplessness. Even if one does attempt to step outside of the enframed space, ideas, aspirations, and objectives which transcend this dominant scientific universe of discourse

are either repelled or forced back into terms of this universe. For example, behavior patterns that deviate from the functional norm are medicalized and spoken about with the force of the entire world of Reason as represented by the relatively new discipline of psychiatry. The linguistic medicalization of a behavior (for example hysteria or drapetomia) represents an etymological empowerment that derives its legitimacy by associating with the vocabulary of science. In *The Myth of Mental Illness* the 20th century psychiatrist Thomas Szasz showed that the one diagnosed with a mental “disease” is often no more than one who is a social heretic insofar as he or she insists on an “unreasonable” or inefficient lifestyle, even if the diagnosis is completely lacking a biological pathology. Michel Foucault recognizes this continually in *Madness and Civilization* by revealing that in the Enlightened Age one who refuses to buy into the dominant culture is negated by being labelled “mad” and as one who goes “against Reason.” In the preface to the 1961 edition of this book Foucault describes the social psychological fissure that resulted from the triumph of reason: “Modern man no longer communicates with the madman ... There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue, gives the separation as already enacted, and expels from the memory all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly, in which the exchange between madness and reason was carried out. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue by reason about madness, could only have come into existence in such a silence.”

But what impact does this now dominant mode of thinking have on the individual’s evaluation of her own existence and of their experiences in daily life? The reductionism of scientific thinking pushes externally into society and evaluations of others, but reflexively it functions to reduce

one's evaluation of their own being into a series of fixed processes. If scientific thinking only acknowledges as real that which is quantitative, reproducible, and explainable through some form of empirically based study, then those immersed within this thought system begin viewing the reality of their experience with these criteria in mind. Thus what results in what Max Weber called "disenchantment with the world." The concept describes the character of the modernized Western society in which scientific understanding takes prominence over belief, magic, or mysticism and all life processes are oriented rationally in a strict chain of causality. The demystified rationality operates within a closed system. This society sits in opposition to the more traditional and primitive society, in which the life-world "remained a great enchanted garden" in which inexplicable and mysterious aspects of life were accepted and even embraced. Now any anomalous event is assumed to fit within a larger systematic framework and any sort of mystery is diagnosed or analyzed out of it.

The modern world has been "deserted by the gods." We have chased them away and rationalized and made calculable what was formerly governed by passion and devotion, chance and good fortune, grace and justice, imprecations and invocations, personal charisma and noble ethics. We sit above the unfolding cosmos and view it as an object of study, and lose ourselves as meaningful subjects in the midst of the quest to understand it all.

Manifold recent technologies allow and encourage an understanding of the self as a disengaged entity divorced from the reality of his or her own personal moment. In observing how these technologies are used it is clear that the highly efficient reduction does not only apply to one's view of one another and the world, but also to the inward reflective view of one's own

experience. One has to look no further than how technologies such as the camera have been used to validate the reality of one's experience. An experience is validated as authentic by a picture being taken of it, and it is not uncommon to hear someone say "pics or it didn't happen." The experience, by virtue of the camera, is now in a way indefinitely contained within the pixels of the photograph; the photograph is saved, reproduced, transferred, manipulated, shared; the experience is made into a thing that can be downloaded, commodified, and distributed at one's leisure. Technology is structured internally by a scientific methodology that demands reproducibility. Thus authenticity is inextricably entwined with reproducibility, as they legitimate and co-define one another.

One cannot simply just believe the other anymore without reasons as to why they should, as it is now actually uncommon not to be a doubting Thomas. "Seeing is believing," and a photograph can capture and reproduce seeing to the universal critical eye. We must all see and feel the wounds, or see and feel a picture of them.

The photograph, insofar as it serves to indefinitely "capture the moment," serves to step out of the fabric of the continuity of lived existence – what Merleau-Ponty would call embodied being – towards a disjointed and scientifically reproducible mode of understanding one's own experiences – one which abstracts away from inimitable activity itself. The poignancy of the indivisible moment of experience is compromised in the effort of the one taking the photograph to digitally capture the moment and make it into an object that can be shared and observed like any *worthy* and respectable object of study. The camera is first used to mediate between the person and direct engagement with the environment of their physical location, and the resulting

photograph validates that the experience actually occurred in what is deemed the “real world” of infinitely communicable information. The phenomenon of modern concert-goers feeling compelled to record the experience with their cell phones en masse even though it is being recorded by so many others speaks to this filtered experiential epistemology.

In 1964 Herbert Marcuse expressed concern that “The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment.” The “soul” or spirit of the self is now divided through many more complex and subtly powerful technologies that Marcuse would have imagined 50 years ago. Now one can split and validate their identity through many more internally involved and coercive forms. One is unspokenly encouraged to divide his or her identity into more and more distinct and analyzable segments, each of which are seen as valid in constructing the “real” and verifiable identity of the individual. The real of valid identity of the individual becomes the conglomeration of several disconnected and analyzable pieces of data –something not unlike (though certainly not the same as) Hume’s Bundle Theory of identity, which he proposed, and then, upon critical reflection, conceded that it possessed many “considerable mistakes”. Such an ontology rejects a fluid continuity of identity and convolutes the understanding of the self. One becomes what they have posted on Facebook, who they follow on Twitter, what kind of phone they have, what materials they can purchase as represented by the size of their income, what shows they have watched on Netflix, and so on. The avarice of capitalism assures that this rampant materialism defines the culture and recycles itself in the eternal exchange of capital, and the techno-rational underpinning of this culture assures that such a method of self-identification is thought of as entirely legitimate (Weber, 8). People become the kind of being that

acknowledge as valid a life that is defined by distinct and falsifiable pieces of information in a strictly intelligible chronology and are incapable of accepting or understanding that which steps outside of this framework of thinking. While the madman or the recluse used to be seen as touched by God or the Devil, or in tune with an alternative conversation, now he is a non-contributive and malfunctioning piece of machinery that needs to be fixed or removed from the public arena.

The lost forgotten primal truth of which Heidegger alluded to could only exist outside of this instrumentalizing framework, if it could be said to exist at all. It would be to set sail into the existential or into the mystic and outside of the totalizing world of reason. A Kierkegaardian orientation towards truth as divided in terms of a division between objective and subjective would allow for one to have a less asphyxiating understanding of the concept of truth.

Kierkegaard did indeed intend for his work to critique and decry the impoverishing and existentially stifling force of a Universal Reason, and to illuminate a way in which *one* can step forth meaningfully and passionately independent of techno-rationality. However, this ability comes at the cost of self-identifying as a deviant, irrational, or as a person with insufficient cognitive abilities.

CHAPTER III

ABSTRACTIONISM AND LEVELING

"In order for leveling really to occur, first it is necessary to bring a phantom into existence, a spirit of leveling, a huge abstraction, an all-embracing something that is nothing, an illusion--the phantom of the public. . . . The public is the real Leveling-Master, rather than the leveler itself, for leveling is done by something, and the public is a huge nothing." -Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*

Kierkegaard, in diagnosing the crisis of his times, identified it as a time filled with understanding and reflection, but entirely devoid of passion. Insofar as reasoned reflection dominates the social discourse it precludes the possibility of anomalous or dissenting voices and *transforms the social conversation from a discourse to a monologue* which is performed on an abstract representational stage. He says "For intelligence has got the upper hand to such an extent that it transforms the real task into an unreal trick and reality into a play." That which is not embedded within the framework of the self-perpetuating social narrative and vocabulary is unconditionally repressed or rejected, as it is ineffectual towards fulfilling the aims of a levelled society that operates under the assumption that individual emotive states are antithetical and hostile to the goals of universal reason. The binary opposition between reason and emotion is foundational to the worldview of the rational Enlightened thinker, and thus functions to channel ideas associated with one or the other into oppositional dichotomous categories: reasonable vs emotional becomes synonymous with true vs false, scientific vs religious, valid vs invalid, efficient vs incorrect, etc. "Good life" becomes thought of and described as an abstract collective undertaking rather than a

lifetime task of the individual. Thoughts and behaviors which are not fixed and decisively explicable are self-consciously diagnosed as defective and unhealthy – social life then operates under the assumption of a new secular Manicheanism. In this new ethical order unhealthiness, unreason, and inefficiency become the most abominable of sins.

Quality of living is quantified. The place with the highest quality of living has the highest average life expectancy, the highest average income, the highest literacy rate, and so on. Every citizen could be living in a state of existential malaise and socioeconomic prosperity like Binx Bolling in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, who in a state of torment queries "Have you noticed that only in time of illness or disaster or death are people real?" But so long as the detached quantifications declared them as having the "highest quality of life" then by the rules of the social psychological structure, it must be the case. The individual evaporates within the abstract spirit of collective empirical quantifiable leveling. "Authenticity" is intangible and unquantifiable, it is unattainable, it is simply a meaningless word.

Advanced industrial society has been described as structured around the idea of the repression of human instincts and the sublimation of the drives that fuel these instincts into suitable and benign behaviors. Insofar as technological rationality has framed the conversation in which the lived experience takes place, primary instincts must find outlets in ways created by and coherent with the technoscientific thought system (Marcuse O-DM, 32). A large majority of modern youth seem to find an outlet for aggressive and competitive drives in various high-tech and highly abstract outlets, such as video games and computer games. Fundamental sexual impulses are satisfied by the easily accessible world of internet pornography. The identity of the individual

insofar as he or she exists in cyberspace is largely amorphous, abstract, and unaccountable. Individual responsibility is not emphasized or required in the abstract world of the internet, rather the force and abuses of the internet and what takes place within it is talked about as if it is a natural phenomenon in some faraway land; “the internet is a crazy place.” One might as well speak of an ocean or a desert, not a community of individual people with active and responsible personalities and wills. The cyber-public is impossibly abstract and completely disembodied and aloof, yet functionally a massive communicator of information and functions as an ongoing journal that describes the new human experience. Insofar as it has “become a public” in the Kierkegaardian sense it has no direct connection to anyone but a definitional and contextual relevance to everyone. This fundamentally different experience and understanding of Being creates fundamentally different existential and existential relationships between people and a fundamentally different existential understanding of oneself – that of reductive abstract universalizability (Jonas, 7).

In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas argues that the new world of mass media is extremely cheap and highly powerful. Mass media in many ways attempts to make people believe a public exists where none actually exists; new disciplines such as advertising and public relations have been created with this tacit understanding. The classic idea of the distinction between the public and the private has dissolved away largely because of the hegemonizing force of modern mass interconnected technologies, and what results is an overwhelming and indistinct societal complex of anonymous forces operating in a obscured world lacking in clear reference points or loci of engagement. It is essentially a marketplace of ideas without the market, or a place to shop without the store, or a red light district without the

streets and brothels. It provides a means to satisfy desires and instincts without any rigor, risk, or physical expense. It becomes a discreet and universally accessible outlet for the spectrum of conscious and unconscious drives.

The anonymity that the internet allows provides people with the opportunity to express controversial and offensive views without the imperative of personal accountability that was required with earlier methods of communication, such as in salons and coffeehouses and public meeting rooms (Goode, 14). Insofar as one feels they have spoken out and done their part by leaving a scathing comment on YouTube, that may very well placate their desire for rational-critical debate and allow them to move along without ever speaking in a meaningful forum. The idea of the concrete coherent self that had been assumed in the past is replaced by an inconstant and manifold conceptualization of identity which allows one to create various forms of identity in various non-spacial forums. One is seen through the distorted lens of an identity kaleidoscope in which they toss and turn about in a chaotic sea of information without ever establishing a firm metaphorical or physical footing on the ground. One can now be exiled from a community without ever moving from his computer desk. Yet this same person can also be simultaneously grooming multiple other identity profiles on different forums. The actual fleshy person behind the various identities is infinitely obscured behind several layers of immaterial impersonality in a space that is not defined or conceivable in terms of extension or discreet identity. The face of the other is invisible and at most unsure, true palpable eye contact is impossible, a meaningful caress is entirely out of the picture. Emergent technologies such as Skype or the extremely bizarre Fundawear (which allows distant lovers to “touch” one another erotically across the world) suggest that the ideal communication involves facial and physical interplay, yet they cannot but

roughly approximate the experience. An AT&T ad campaign launched in 1979 exhorted the customer to “Reach out and touch someone,” it offered human contact but kept hidden the truth which is that such technologies have only moved us further and further away from that contact. Such technology takes the place of actual closeness and removes the potential for trust among actual interacting physical beings.

The subtle intricacies of one’s identity are leveled by the technological process of social enframing. This enframing is inextricably co-present and co-formative with the idea of Progress. While precision and accuracy are demanded by any implementation of technological rationality, in many ways a paradoxical abstraction falls over those behind and subjected to the implementation of this precise rationality. The abstractionism inherent within the communities formed within cyberspace easily allows for the deflation of the value and meaning of otherwise significant aspects of the human experience. The significance of the word friend is sure to have decreased in the wake of the Facebook friend phenomenon – one can have 1,248 “friends” and have actually only ever spoken to 50% of them. To communicate happiness or amusement one can simply deploy a smiley face emoticon. It becomes the universal face of happiness, yet it is a face that exists nowhere in the world. It has no lines or wrinkles, and displays none of the idiosyncrasies and particularities of an actual existing persons face. *It will never age and will show no scars as it stands in and represents the immortal and eternal universe from which it comes. It is a messenger from the inaccessible all-encompassing world of the truth, entirely set apart yet thoroughly internalized.* This example captures the new language or techno-universal symbolism born of a social consciousness thoroughly undergirded by an idealized technicity. One’s expression and understanding of externalized happiness is leveled to a universalizeable

signifier with no consideration towards the particularly existing individual. It represents an abstract universal idea of happiness that is mined from the deep-most womb of simplistic objective knowledge.

To show a preference towards this manner of communication and to be less inclined to talk with others in physical proximity is a result of the way technicity has allowed and implicitly encouraged the new generation to take flight from the tension surrounding the possibility of “awkwardness” – which is the greatest of all fears - and the discomfort that often occurs in embodied dialogue as a result of perceived awkwardness. There is no such thing as an “awkward silence” on the internet, but it is the omnipresent enemy of casual acquaintances, classmates, even friends, and it must be anticipated and resisted. And Kierkegaard noticed that “Talkativeness is afraid of the silence which reveals its emptiness.” The presence that the face and the voice of the other holds is much more substantial, more powerful and mysterious, and much less easily categorized than a thumbnail image with text around it. The presence of the other physically is often overwhelming – such presence communicates through a plethora of ways and in languages far subtler than can be communicated symbolically and at a distance. Thus the latter is much more easily digestible and much less accurate. The latter holds minimal spirit-presence. The idea of the spirit has no place in the modern conversation. It would be more appropriate to describe the phenomenon empirically by seeking a biochemical stand-in for the notion.

One does not have to have had the personal experience of “being in love” to know all there is to know about it because it is merely serotonin and oxytocin (and whatever other chemicals)

flooding the brain in certain quantities and locations, nor must one have to have a child in order to speak dismissively about how it is no more than a natural experience in line with principles of evolutionary biology. I can imagine such a person with their arm around their selected mate saying “*Yes, my love, we have such organic chemistry! Let us procreate and thus account for the perpetuation of our species.*” The romance of the idea is almost unbearable. Now by no means do all or even most scientists think this way, but the fact that it is a kind of thinking that does exist is bizarre and most unsettling.

While the human used to stand above the rest of that which is in “nature” as a being endowed with spiritual qualities, the new scientific man is just another complex piece of organic machinery with nothing admirable about him save the complexity of his or her biological circumstance. It is not convincing that this method of approaching being cultivates a strong sense of interpersonal respect; I have never valued a machine as an end in itself, I have only ever valued a machine instrumentally in terms of what it can do for me.

Further still, an aversion to embodied engagement with others would follow as a result of the unpredictable and often non-categorizeable particularities that occur when speaking directly with another. The system under which techno-rationality operates is resistant to particularity, and thus it makes perfect sense that those who have been saturated in such a system would be averse to embodied dialogue and more in favor of the much less obtrusive, more easily manageable, more superficial, and much more easily categorizeable communication methods that contemporary technology offers. Even a phone call, a relatively new technology, is too close for comfort for many people today. A text will do just fine.

To show an aversion towards embodied engagement with others is to be a systematic thinker, one averse to the unpredictable potentiality of the other in multi-dimensional dialogue. Emmanuel Levinas, the 20th century French philosopher, known for his views on alterity and ethical responsibility, recognized that the face of the other is that which brings about a feeling of responsibility towards the other, and thus for him feeling disinclined to be in the presence of the face is indicative of a serious moral inadequacy. In disengaging from embodiment and identifying with untethered abstract universal principles one takes flight from the realization of the imminent presence of the mortality of the other and reflectively takes flight from the understanding of the imminent presence of their own mortality. In so doing one flees from the imperative of responsibility that comes from a deep existential knowledge of the fragility and vulnerability of life as understood through standing closely with the fragile and weak, and which does not translate through screens which portray nothing but static life translated through a medium which gives the impression of immortality.

CHAPTER IV

EXISTENTIAL RE-ENCHANTMENT

“Ingenuity was apparently given man in order that he may supply himself in crises with shapes and sounds with which to guard himself from truth.” William Faulkner, *Light in August*.

To avoid becoming a victim of the collective normative void brought about by the process of disenchantment and levelling one must undertake a deliberate existential rejuvenation and rehabilitation. To break free of Weber’s *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, the “iron cage” of teleological efficiency and the barren icy cold darkness left behind after the vanquishing of the conditions that allow for the possibility of a rich openness to the manifold variability of human experience, one must discharge the assumptions responsible for those conditions. To issue a *cri de coeur* would be to insist on a level of communication unfounded in the within the minds of the peloton, yet a level which cannot be rejected fundamentally. A more liberal and diverse conception of truth and *eo ipso* a more layered and pluralistic conception of reality must be appropriated in order to respect the infinite complexity and mystery of one’s one person and the being of others. The radical inaccessibility of the other when they are not totally defined in terms of an infinitely divisible relation of necessarily connected components shrouds them beneath a veil of respectful uncertainty, while allowing a space in which the spirit can move according with itself. “Kindred spirits” are allowed to exist when people stop being objects of study. The connection between persons under this way of thinking goes beyond being shallowly rooted in a reciprocal exchange of benefits; it transcends the inhuman and impoverishing utilitarianism which has spread as a disease taking the life-spirit out of all that which it attaches and infects.

Kierkegaard defines truth: “An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for the individual.” Notably he directs this conception of truth towards the individual, which is the only being that does exist concretely and is not spread about as an abstract fog (Kierkegaard, 160). However he also recognizes that objective truth does too exist. Objective truth does not involve the appropriation process, one can know that twice two is four, and this knowledge is to the highest degree impersonal. Applied theologically, someone may be in possession of all the so-called truths of rational theology, able to rationally prove and to disprove propositions and be capable of holding his own dialectically with the best; And yet in his heart God may have died or possibly never have even been alive because the truth-knowledge of this God is ossified objectively. “The path of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and existence thereby into something indifferent, vanishing.” (Kierkegaard, 162) To stand individually and to commit passionately to an idea regardless of technoscientific epistemological demands towards reproducibility and universality is to understand the truth at the heart of existing as a particular subjective self. To understand the fundamental difference in the co-presence and interplay between these two dimensions of truth offers a means whereby one can experience a new transformative understanding of their own being and the being of others that is not crippled by the short-sighted substratum of principled rationality pre-supposed to dictate and dominate the truth discourse. To passionately uproot oneself from the firm ground of universal rationality is to embrace the opportunity of participating in a vigorous existentialism and simultaneously to allow for the possibility of a deeply empathetic humanism that transcends material boundaries and biological differentiation.

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